

45-47 Union Avenue
(Cotton brokerage house)
Memphis
Shelby County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-187

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

45-47 UNION AVENUE
(Cotton brokerage house)

HABS No. TN-187

Location: 45-47 Union Avenue, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

Latitude: 35° 08' 36"

Longitude: 90° 03' 20"

Present Owner: Mrs. Alfred T. MacFarland, 1 MacFarland Lane, Castalian Springs, Tennessee.

Present Occupant: R. H. Allen and Company
(45 Union Avenue)

Dockery and Donelson
(47 Union Avenue)

Present Use: Cotton brokerage house.

Significance: An excellent example of the early cotton brokerage houses of Memphis' Cotton Row, this building retains much of its exterior and interior character including its stairhall and skylighted carding rooms.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1875.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title covering the period of improvement on Lot 7, Block 19, Country Lot 491 may be found in the Register of Deeds and in the records of Probate and Chancery Courts for Shelby County.

1848 Title Bond December 1, 1848, recorded February 7, 1849 in Book 1 page 416 (Lot 7, no improvement mentioned, \$3500.00)
Silas Buck et al (W. W. Hart estate)
to
Wardlaw Howard

1849 Deed December 1, 1849, recorded December 23, 1849 in Book 4 page 124 (same; Warranty Deed)
Silas Buck et al
to
Wardlaw Howard

- 1862 Deed May 2, 1862, recorded May 28, 1862 in
Book 51 page 551
Wardlaw Howard
to
Major L. Meacham and William B. Galbreath
- 1884 Will June 20, 1873, recorded December 26, 1884 in
Will Book 9 page 154 (life estate)
Major L. Meacham
to
Annie Meacham McCallum
- 1941 Decree October 31, 1941, recorded October 31, 1941 in
Chancery Minute, Book 220 page 336 (Cause #38740 RD)
Chancery Court
to
William Bate Williams
- 1945 Deed June 14, 1945, recorded June 22, 1945 in
Book 1905 page 206
Union Planters Bank and Trust Company and Milburn K.
Noell (executors for William Bate Williams, deceased)
to
Elizabeth Bate Williams (mother of deceased)
- 1947 Deed July 2, 1947, recorded August 2, 1947 in
Book 2045 page 66 (\$25,000.00)
William T. Bate and Hortense Bate (wife)
to
Julia T. Bate (daughter)

- B. Historical Context: It is known that there were earlier buildings at 45-47 Union, described in land deeds as "numbers three and four on Howards Row." They were built in about 1848-50. Later, in about 1875 they were demolished, and on their site the present building was built.

The present building and its neighbor buildings on the Cotton Row have housed a variety of tenants for many years. There were usually wholesale grocers or similar merchants at street level, cotton factors and brokers on the upper floors.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This late 19th century commercially designed building has a simple rectangular plan, wide front doors and numerous windows. It is similar to many other 19th century commercial buildings in the nation.

2. Condition of fabric: In spruced-up condition since 1970s.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building's approximate dimensions are 50' x 100'. It is seven bays wide and three stories high on the north front; the rear is two stories high. A simple rectangle in plan, there is an 8" party wall dividing the building into two parts.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Wall construction and structural system: The 8" brick bearing walls carry the load of floor joists which span from east to west. The walls are strengthened with tie rods with star-shaped terminals. The cast-iron square columns on the front first floor are original.
4. Stoop: There is a nine-step stoop set into the middle front bay which gives access to the upper levels.
5. Chimneys: There are two chimneys along the center brick wall of the building. They measure 13" x 40" and 13" x 18" and they extend above the roof about 4 feet. The chimneys are of brick.
6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The front facade has a center bay with access to the upper levels. The recessed doorway is about 4-1/2' back and contains a set of double doors, each door being 2'-0" x 6'-7" with five panels. The transom is blocked over. The other six bays (three each side) were originally enclosed with double doors which filled the bays. They were topped with five-light transoms. The doors measured 3'-0" x 10'-11" x 3". The doors to the right (45 Union) are still extant. Those to the left (47 Union) have been removed and modern storefront openings have been installed.

Doors on the south rear give access to the alley.

- b. Windows: On the north front, second floor, each bay has a double-hung window (3'-3" x 8'-5"), within a segmental arch opening. The sash has 4/4 lights. The third floor windows are semicircular arched openings with 1/1 sash. They measure 3'-0" x 8'-0". All of them have simple brick keystones and brick heads.

On the rear there are double-hung windows at the second and third levels (since the third floor is only partial, these third floor windows are not visible from the alley). On the second floor the windows measure 3'-0" x 6'-7" and have 4/4 sash. On the third floor they are 3'-0" x 6'-5" with 6/6 sash. There are skylights 10'-6" x 15'-0" x 8'-4" and 6'-0" x 9'-0" x 2'-11" which open to the north. The wired glass is translucent.

The small openings above the third floor windows on the front facade are attic vents; they have decorative cast-iron grilles.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gently sloping roof is of tar and gravel and slopes to the south. There is a brick parapet on the north front and one down the center of the building. The rear of the roof has a gutter at the roof's edge.
- b. Cornice: Brick cornice with scrolled brackets on the front facade.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basements: There are two separate basements accessible from their respective main floors. Each basement is a single room (45 Union has a series of small rooms along the north front) with a line of wood columns down the center.
- b. First floor: 45 Union (right-hand side): This side is one large room with a modern office enclosure along the west wall. The rear 13-1/2' is a separate room and the front 20' appear to have formerly been a separate room.

47 Union (left-hand side): This side has been divided into several offices with frame partitions. There is a corridor along the east side of the building.
- c. Second floor: Access is made to the second floor via the main stairway at the center of the north facade (now closed up) and via a stairway in the southeast corner of the building (47 Union). There is no

access from 45 Union. There is a stairhall within the building which is tall and tight. It has a skylighted roof and gives access to second and third floor offices. Behind these offices are the carding rooms.

- d. Third floor: This level is only one room deep and extend along the north front, serving as an office.
2. Stairways: The main stairway, with its molded wood handrail and turned balusters and newel, is at the center of the north front. There are twenty-six risers in a single, straight run which give access to the stairhall at the second floor. A stairway from the second to third floors wraps around the hall counter-clockwise with ten risers to a landing which extends across the south wall. An additional eight risers give access to the third floor landing across the north side. The intermediate landing services the toilets on the south wall. The hall is skylighted and there are double-hung windows passing light into the spaces off it.

A stairway in the southeast corner of 47 Union gives access to the second floor carding rooms. A stairway to the basement is located beneath that stair.

The basement of 45 Union is accessible via a stair below a trapdoor at the east wall.

3. Flooring: Basement: concrete.
First floor: 3-1/4" board laid diagonally on 4" subfloor at 45 Union; 10" boards at 47 Union.
Second floor: 3-1/4" and 5" boards.
Third floor: 4" boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish:
- a. Walls: Basement: exposed brick.
First floor: painted brick and unpainted plaster over the front 20' of wall at 45 Union; painted brick and unpainted frame partitions with horizontal tongue-and-groove siding at 47 Union.
Second floor: painted brick; offices are plastered and have 37" high vertical board wainscot.
Third floor: painted plaster.

- b. Ceilings: Basement: 7'-0" ceiling height.
First floor: tongue-and-groove boards; 12'-0" ceiling height.
Second floor: tongue-and-groove boards; lath and plaster in offices; Ceiling heights: 10'-11" in offices; carding room ceilings slope from 13'-10" to 11'-0".
Third floor: lath and plaster; 9'-9" ceiling height.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: On the second floor there is a 5'-0" x 7'-3" opening in the 8" brick wall down the center of the building. Office doors are 3'-0" x 7'-0" x 1-3/8" and have four panels. Some doors have a glazed panel. Doors have three-light transoms.
- b. Windows: (Not recorded).

6. Decorative features and trim: The colors of the carding rooms are interesting. The black and grey with skylighting was necessary for judging the quality of cotton.

7. Hardware: Standard; butt hinges and porcelain knobs.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is situated on the south side of Union Avenue just west of Front Street. It is in an urban setting and consumes the entire lot. The site slopes about 4' from east to west.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Property records. Shelby County Register's Office, 160 No. Main Street, Memphis, Tennessee 38103.

National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C. "Front Row Historic District (Cotton Row Historic District)", National Register Inventory-Nomination Form, 1979.

2. Secondary and published sources:

McIlwaine, Shields. "On Cotton Row with Mr. Bill," in Memphis Down in Dixie. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1948, pp. 290-311. It is recommended for those interested in the activities associated with a Memphis cotton brokerage house.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1972 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the West Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by Robert C. Giehn (University of Arizona), project supervisor, and Richard H. Hulan, project historian (Nashville).

Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, took the photographs of the building in March 1974.

The written data was edited in the Spring of 1985 by Susan McCown, HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, for transmittal to the Library of Congress.